

12 ÉMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

It is even possible that the documents which have dis-appeared from his *dossier* would have shown that he ended by completely justifying himself. Indeed, those documents may have been abstracted for the express purpose of leaving suspicion on his memory. On the other hand, there may have been some imprudence on his part, some neglect or infringement of the cast-iron military regulations; and, as Émile Zola himself has admitted, if it be true that his father became infatuated with Madame Fischer, he may for a moment have lost his head — particularly, one may add, at the thought of her approaching departure from Algiers. No one can say how it really happened that the Fischers had some of Zola's money in their possession. Had it been coaxed, or extorted, or, indeed, perhaps stolen from him?¹ In such a case many suppositions are allowable. Even if Zola absconded from his regiment in a moment of madness, it does not necessarily follow that he intended to flee with the woman; in fact, his subsequent behaviour suggests other conclusions. Moreover, the assertions respecting the amount of the deficit in Zola's accounts are contradictory; and when it is observed that he can only have been charged temporarily with the wardrobe department of the Foreign

Legion, in the place, it would seem, of a certain Lieutenant Eidoux,² the question even arises how far he himself was really responsible for the deficit. In any case, he speedily discharged his liability.

¹ This idea has suggested itself to many people, and, curiously enough, is embodied in a five-act drama entitled "Patalite," by M. Eugene Quenemeur; produced at Nantes in March, 1903, with Parisian artists in the chief parts. The play is a strange blending of Fra[^]ois Zola's adventure and the Dreyfus case.

² "Le Pere d'fanile Zola/" pp. 176, 177.